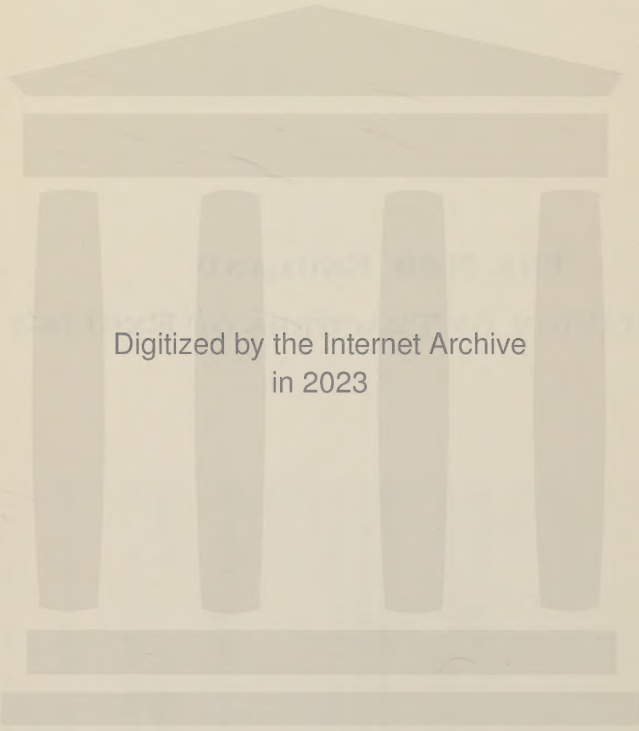


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**THE NEW ENGLAND
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH**



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THE NEW ENGLAND
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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LEAFLET

W. W. LIVENGOOD

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THE STUDY OF MAGAZINES

Shall the teacher of English in high school make use of current periodical publications in the class room? This question is being answered in pedagogical practice today by one of three attitudes: (a) a seeming disapproval by totally ignoring the presence of such an inquiry; (b) an outspoken condemnation; (c) the third will be the contention of this paper.

The first class, those who design not to commit themselves, may be separated into two orders: the Conformists and the Pharisees. The Conformists make up the no mean number amongst us, who indolently or craftily prefer to an ill-defined or hazardous trial of the New the deeptrod cow-paths of professional safety. They are the followers of every line of march, never its pathfinders. Hence, their indifference to the particular question propounded may be dismissed in the hope that some day they may be vexed out of their mental complaisance or spiritual smugness. The Pharisees, a constantly diminishing few, are like unto their fellows in their silence but different in motive. They it is, who, behold-themselves as the children of Literary Light, gather up the hems of their classical robes in assumed horror and silently tip-toe around any publication that smells of new ink. To them our very question is heresy, a sort of lèse-majesté against the shades of Erato and Melpomene. This Philistine document is for none of these.

The second class, those who sincerely condemn the study of current magazines as unprofitable, or worse, rely upon a fairly sound theory of pedagogy; viz., that the only safe method of inculcating standards of English literature is to keep constantly before our pupils only the best that time and the judgments of men of literary taste have approved. To this doctrine we would all too willingly subscribe were it a theory and not a condition we have to face. And the conditions to a public high school in a democracy should be not the least of the determinants of the matter taught; for the *end* of our teaching

must be constantly measured by a democratic standard: we dare not forget that we are training not only the "passionate few," who will in their turn transmit the love of the classics, but also that great mass of boys and girls who already compose a part of the heterogeneous American reading public. In the first place, the non-de-script constituency of our schools involves the problem of choosing material to read. On either side of a son of a family, old in literary traditions, are seated representatives from homes in which the word culture is unspoken. This juxtaposed disparity is a severe test of our American optimism in things educational; for we know that, love the classics as we may and inspire that love into a few as we will, the majority will close their Miltons and their Addisons with a sigh of relief as soon as the school-house door shuts behind them. This lack of taste we might hope in the long run to overcome if it were not for a second condition: the great majority of pupils in our high schools drop out long before they have achieved a sufficient distance of the road up Parnassus to justify a faith in their ability to walk without a crutch. Only about 15 per cent of the pupils who entered Shortridge High School in 1907 finished with the class last year.

The whole state of Indiana averaged a per cent less. According to the last report of the United States Commissioner of Education, of the reported enrollment of 915,061 pupils in the public high schools, 803,698 failed to complete their courses. And of the 12.17 per cent. that graduated, only a third contemplated a further pursuance of their studies. Here is a percentage, approximating 87.83 throughout the United States, whose literary standards are scarcely yet in the formative period, suddenly turned loose in a wilderness of contemporary publications.

To understand the significance of this in an age unprecedented in the output of printed matter, we have but to glance at a few figures, indicating the enterprise of modern publishers. In Ayer's *American Newspaper Annual and Directory*, in the list of popular "general" magazines, we find over a hundred titles with an annual distribution of thirteen and a half millions of copies. This is but one list, and is exclusive of "class" publications, which are entered under two hundred and six separate heads, each with a long column of sub-titles. Severance in his *Guide to Periodicals*, estimates that there are now published on this continent some ten thousand periodicals worthy of the attention of cataloguers!

That our boys and girls, in Indianapolis, at least, are reading these publications indiscriminately, is evidenced by a number of censuses that have been taken in our own high school. One of these, in an entering freshman class, is illustrative. In a group of 15 girls and 6 boys, the titles of 42 magazines, which they read either regularly or occasionally, were submitted, the total number of titles mentioned (not allowing for duplication) running to 112. In their classification of these, popularity was divided among the *Ladies Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, the *Red Book*, and the *Blue Book*!

From these facts concerning conditions, it is not hard to deduce a pertinent question: Will the meager training in the standard authors save the great numbers of our boys and girls of unseasoned standards in their choice of these periodicals? Even the small amount they may have had will help, to be sure, even though remotely; and let it be here understood that the purpose of this paper is not to decry the study of the classics. It is rather to advocate that a little of our time, which we now too often use in mutilating pieces of art with the cleaver of "critical" notes, be spent in giving our pupils a standard by which to judge current "literary" productions. And this, I contend, is best done by meeting the problem fairly in the class room, handling the magazines that they themselves are familiar with, helping to elect the dignified and to reject the unworthy.

For the past three years Shortridge High School has accepted this problem. So far we have found it most convenient to place this consideration of magazines in the last half of the sophomore year, correlating it with the study of American literature. If serviceability to a greater number of pupils were considered more, and our course of study less, it might be more profitably taken up earlier. At any rate, I am convinced that the study of these publications should come rather early in high school on account of reaching more of the very pupils who need it most badly; viz., those who enter high school, they know not why, and drop out suddenly for a similar reason. The time spent on this particular work need not be long; for a teacher soon finds he is dealing with material with which the pupils are already familiar. And the unusual interest manifested in the investigation helps to clear up the matter in an unbelievably short time.

The method of handling the subject here is left entirely in the hands of the teacher; for one of our unwritten laws

is that although a course of study may dictate what is to be taught, the method of presentation is left to the instructor, who is then held responsible for results. Hence, it is impossible in this paper to do more than suggest a few of the plans our teachers have found effective. In one instance, as a preliminary to the first lesson in the study of periodicals, the pupils were asked to name over the magazines which they read regularly in their own homes. This led to a discussion of variety and number, with the result that there was aroused a curiosity to investigate what the drug stores and news venders, nearest the pupils' homes, were handling. The next day the members of the class were bubbling over with enthusiasm in their eagerness to report the results of their investigations. During the recitation they were led to discover that in certain quarters of the city a particular magazine was predominant. This, in turn, brought about, for the succeeding lesson, a classification of periodicals on the basis of the subject matter treated. By this time the class room was literally submerged with copies of all sorts of periodicals; and "oral composition," too often a bugbear in its formality, was mastered for once. Everybody wanted to tell of his own discoveries; and he had the documentary proof there in hand to back up his statements. Once a general classification is made, and the "class" or technical magazines eliminated (largely by the pupils themselves,) the teacher is free to direct their attention to the classification of the two types that affect the general reading public most: the "literary" and "current events" periodicals. At this point all the wisdom and tact of the teacher are needed, for here the serious standardizing process is begun; and not infrequently it happens that a pupil stoutly defends the cheap magazines to which his father is a regular subscriber. But if the teacher has made it clear at the outset that he and the members of the class are going into the investigation seriously and sincerely to determine whether each of them is reading the best publication, most of the pupils are willing to forget a home prejudice. Especially is this true if they are made to feel that on them, as a more fortunate class of people, devolves the responsibility of setting up a standard for those who have not had an opportunity to study all types of periodicals. In this connection I am reminded of the instance of a little girl who reported privately to the teacher one morning that she had displaced a cheap "yellow-back" in her own household by taking copies of the *Century* and *Harper's* home with her, and by using the same argu-

ments in their favor that the better trained pupils had brought out in class. On another occasion, in his effort to prove that a certain magazine was of an inferior type, a little fellow suddenly startled the class by producing a "Diamond Dick" novel, the contents of which he proceeded to expose and criticize. The class violently nodded approval. "Now," said he, "if you turn to page so-and-so of—magazine, you will find a story as wild and woolly as this one, and as sickly sentimental." The class got the point! Always the teacher can count on a few of the better bred students to help him set up standards, so that after eight or ten lively recitations, the pupils smile knowingly when the name of a cheap magazine is mentioned; or they come quietly to the teacher after class to inquire if so-and-so is a worthy publication.

In another section the whole matter was approached from the historical standpoint: the rise of magazines was reported on, and the attack was made in the light of literary development, with the same results. Another teacher has found it profitable to use the simpler editorials of the *Outlook* as a basis for the study of paragraph structure. Enough copies of this magazine were voluntarily subscribed for to supply the entire class for a few weeks. Editorials from such periodicals as the *Nation* were brought in for comparison; and thus the investigation was opened up through the more technical route of composition. To all fields of class work the study of magazines may be adapted; they may be made to serve as the basis for oral composition, debate, reports, themes, etc. But our chief aim, as has been expressed repeatedly, is to give our pupils a standard of judgment, to aid them in their choice of magazines, by dealing with the periodicals they are already using. We of Indiana shall not soon forget this moral, when a man like James Whitcomb Riley asserts that his own salvation in the world of letters was brought about by a country schoolmaster, who helped him establish, in a like manner, a distaste for the prevalent "yellow backs" of his own day.

And let it be further said, as a final word to those who have a fear that the introduction of magazines into the school room will cheapen standards of literary taste, that the finest discrimination is necessary to winnow the wheat from the chaff in a harvest that is being threshed out for the first time. And for those who feel that the whole of the gleaning is chaff, we recall here a little quotation of Arnold Bennett's, in the midst of a plea for the classics: "We may

be perfectly sure that our own age will make a favourable impression upon that excellent judge, posterity. Therefore, beware of disparaging the present in your own mind."

W. W. LIVENGOOD.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The Spring meeting of the Association comes on Saturday, the sixteenth of March. The Committee on College Entrance Requirements in English, through its Chairman, Professor C. N. Greenough, will present a report of the investigation it has been making. There will also be a brief report of the work done by the National Conference on Uniform Requirements in English at its February meeting in New York City. The main portion of the program, copies for which will be mailed to members within a few days, will be short talks on the way certain English books or selections are presented to high school classes.

Attention is called to the February number of the *English Journal* which presents a very full discussion of the old, old theme—the college entrance requirements. Out of this prolonged debate it is hoped that much ultimate good will come. Its results have gone to the National Conference, and as this note is being written the delegates to that Conference are having the whole question before them. We are concerned with but one single item—the improvement of English teaching. How much improvement all the discussion has caused can be answered only in the coming years. Our ardent hope is that future meetings of English associations will find more fruitful and more vital themes.

Selected List of Recent Books Prepared for English Classes.

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Edited by Charles W. French. Pocket Classics. The Macmillan Company, (25c).

Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. Edited by Charles G. Dunlap. A recent issue of *The Tudor Shakespeare*, under the general editorship of W. A. Neilson and A. H. Thorndike. The Macmillan Company, (25c).

Brooks's *English Composition*, Book I., (75c). American Book Co.

Halleck's *History of American Literature*, (\$1.25). American Book Co.

Denney, Duncan, and McKinney's *Argumentation and Debate*, \$(1.25). American Book Co.

Carlyle's *Essay on Burns*; *Eclectic English Classics*, (20c). American Book Co.

Irving's Sketch Book; Eclectic English Classics, (20c). American Book Co.

Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream; Eclectic English Classics, (20c). American Book Co.

Thackeray's Henry Esmond; Eclectic English Classics, (60c). American Book Co.

Kellow's Training in English. D. C. Heath & Co.

Stevenson's Treasure Island. Edited by Charles R. Gaston, in charge of the English Classics Series. D. C. Heath & Co.

Woolley's Exercises in English. D. C. Heath & Co.

Hudson's Introduction to the Study of Literature. D. C. Heath & Co.

Webster's English for Secondary Schools, (90c). Houghton Mifflin Co.

Milton's Areopagitica. Edited by Sarah E. Lockwood. Riverside Literature Series, (25c). Houghton Mifflin Co.

Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Edited by Professor Strunk of Cornell University. Riverside Literature Series, (25c). Houghton Mifflin Co.

Shakespeare's King Henry the Fifth. Silver Series of Classics. Silver, Burdett & Co.

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